

"Assassinating King would be analogous to assassinating Ho Chi Minh in the Vietnamese situation, with added fallout benefits in the U.S. situation . . ."

Was the murder of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., the result of a conspiracy?

Parts 1 and 2* of this series of articles introduced the "eggs and sausage" man, a mysterious person who appeared on the scene the day of the murder.

Wayne Chastain has also examined the theory of a larger conspiracy — left-wing radicals or black militants, or the Federal Government, or right-wing racists — and disqualified each of these as a realistic possibility. But he continues to investigate, "Who really killed Dr. King, and does this relate to the murders of the Kennedys and other political assassinations in America?"

Conspiracy by Paramilitary Organizations

The paramilitary right, as the third possibility, presents many very persuasive arguments. The Minutemen was one of the more visible paramilitary right-wing organizations in early 1965, but by 1968, when King was killed, the FBI had penetrated the organization, split its ranks, and forced it to go underground. Thus it was doubtful that this particular paramilitary organization had the power to carry off a successful conspiracy and effective cover-up. Although some elements of the organization had marked King and Senator Fulbright¹ for assassination, it was DePugh himself who defused the plots. The objectives of the Minutemen were the same as the black militants — namely, to trigger violent urban warfare in the nation. Their ultimate objective was to step in and take over the government when it proved inadequate to cope with rising lawlessness in the street, in much the same fashion as Hitler and the Nazi Party did in Germany in the late 1920's and early 1930's.

It is doubtful, however, that the minutemen had the cohesive organization and sufficient allies inside the Federal Government to have achieved a successful cover-up.² There was no evidence to link James Earl Ray (assuming for argument's sake that Ray did indeed kill King) with the Minutemen, although one report this writer investigated contended the Minutemen — headquartered in Independence, Mo. — had its largest membership in that state and had penetrated the ranks of the State Police and the Prison System. Thus, "the Minutemen arranged for Ray's escape in 1967". This writer could not confirm the substance of that report. Note, Ray was linked indirectly to the National States Rights Party as his brother, Jerry Ray, was an active member.

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Ray's attorney, J. C. Stoner, is also the attorney for both the KKK and the National States Rights Party.³ As discussed above, neither one of these parties or organizations have the clout to carry off a successful cover-up because they are heavily penetrated by the FBI.

The Military-Industrial Complex

If one uses the term "paramilitary right" in a broader sense, rather than one or two organizations such as the Minutemen or the American Nazi Party, then one could conceive of a select group that could carry off a successful assassination and a subsequent cover-up. Such a select group of paramilitarists would of necessity come from within the enclaves of the powerful military-industrial complex. They could include military persons, civilians within governments and wealthy private citizens. The latter would be members of the respectable right, those who kept a low profile on the issues, and were not visible on the landscape of anti-communist activities.

The matrix of anti-King feeling in the nation contained a dimension that has often been overlooked when speculating on motives that may have lay behind a murder conspiracy. This dimension imperceptibly grew between 1965-68 because it was obscured by Dr. King's escalation of domestic civil rights issues — such as housing in Chicago, voting rights in Selma, and decent wages for black sanitation workers in Memphis — during this same period. This dimension is reflected by the escalation of Dr. King's anti-Vietnam War rhetoric and his increasing participation in anti-war protest demonstrations. Dr. Abernathy and other SCLC leaders had in private urged Dr. King to stick to black civil rights issues, for both tactical reasons⁴ and because some feared Dr. King might meet the fate of Malcolm X.

Dr. King's Anti-War Activities

On the day before he was killed, Dr. King made one of the most vehement anti-war speeches of his career. It was made in the courtyard of the Centenary Methodist Church (FBI agents — with movie cameras — sat in parked cars across the street). The church's pastor, Rev. James Lawson, an articulate and black intellectual, represented the dove faction of the SCLC, which had always urged Dr. King to sound out loud and clear against the war. Lawson had organized the first anti-war, peace demonstrations in Memphis two years before. Lawson's anti-war activities had also aroused the ire of the white majority. Rev. Lawson's pacifism dated back to the early 1950's when he preferred to go to Federal

AS INDICATED, MR. CHASTAIN SEEMS TO FOLLOW
A "FAREWELL AMERICA" LINE.

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poison, rather than register as a conscientious objector at his draft board. Lawson had shrewdly detected that there were groups who hated King — and himself — but who were not "overt racists". Lawson had described these groups as "paranoid patriots" at a foreign policy seminar on United Nations Day the year before, becoming the target of the local John Birch Society and the American Legion's watch dog committee on subversion. Lawson said the "neurotic preoccupation with anti-Communism had blinded many whites to the racist ramifications of the Vietnam policy". He pointed out a higher percentage of black soldiers dying in Vietnam than white soldiers, to "satisfy the white man's anti-Communist fetish". The net effect, Rev. Lawson said, was a "racist war" against the interests of blacks in America and destructive of the lives of the yellow-skinned Vietnamese.

Writers⁵ reflecting the view of the "paranoid patriots" and paramilitary professionals expressed the view that Dr. King loomed as a "national security threat to the nation," but these writers did not necessarily criticize his role in pure civil rights activities for blacks. "King is today the most dangerous man in America," lamented one writer.⁶ This was because King was about to lead his Poor People's March to Washington beginning in June, 1968.

Five Events in Early 1968

Five events occurred in early 1968 that had a traumatic effect on those who viewed the winning of the Vietnam War as an imperative to "stopping worldwide Communism".

1. The Tet Offensive occurred in late February and early March. The event shattered the confidence of Americans — both within the official and private sectors — in the South Vietnamese Government's ability to represent the South Vietnam populace and survive the assault of a phenomenon that now appeared to be a "civil war" after all. (The earlier assumption was that North Vietnam had invaded the South through infiltration tactics). For the first time, a thin majority of American public opinion favored pulling out. Many newspapers changed their long-time, hawkish and super-patriotic editorial policies. Inside government, long-time, hardened hawks became fledgling doves (Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford; U.S. Senator Stuart Symington, one-time Secretary of the Air Force under the late President Harry Truman).
2. The virtual abdication of President Lyndon Johnson on the Sunday night before the Thursday slaying of Dr. King. This event opened the floodgates for dovish Democrats to vie for the Democratic nomination. Eugene McCarthy had just barely lost the New Hampshire primary six weeks before, and Robert F. Kennedy had already announced his candidacy.
3. The announcement accompanying President Johnson's abdication that he was going to call a bombing halt for the extreme portion of North Vietnam and was immediately launching peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese in Paris.
4. The riot in Memphis in March. This event was described by Time magazine as the "beginning of a long, hot, bloody summer of 1968". Dr. King was enroute to start peace marches in North Mississippi when he returned to Memphis, where he was killed, to attempt a peaceful demonstration.

Wayne Chastain of Memphis, Tenn., is a veteran newspaper reporter and southern journalist with experience on several metropolitan dailies in Texas including El Paso, Houston, Dallas and San Antonio, as well as on the St. Louis Globe-Democrat and a Memphis daily. He had traveled with Dr. King's entourage on and off for two years prior to the assassination. He had spent the last two days of King's life covering his speeches in Memphis prior to the shooting. He was on the murder scene within 10 minutes after Dr. King was shot. He interviewed eyewitnesses for one of the first comprehensive news accounts to the nation of Dr. King's death. A native Texan and a graduate of the University of Texas with a bachelor's degree in history and political science, Mr. Chastain also spent several months in early 1964 investigating and researching the assassination of President Kennedy, Jack Ruby's link with Lee Harvey Oswald and a group of pro-Cuban arms runners, and other activities related to Kennedy's death. Months before The Warren Commission's report, which was published in the fall of 1964, Mr. Chastain — after exhaustive interviews with hundreds of witnesses — had reached the conclusion that President Kennedy's death was the result of a plot involving paramilitary professionals financed by a group of wealthy, right-wing Texans with the Central Intelligence Agency as well as lower echelon CIA personnel still assigned to the bureau. The present installment is an excerpt from a forthcoming book entitled: Who Really Killed Dr. King — And the Kennedys? A Disturbing View of Political Assassinations in America.

5. The announcement that Dr. King would lead a "Poor People's March" from Mississippi to Washington, D.C., in June. According to many writers reflecting the paramilitarist viewpoint, this explosive event may have been the spark that would bring to the nation's capital the massive rioting of Detroit and Newark of the summer before. The powder keg in Washington, however, would contain the potential of a much more devastating detonation because it would occur in a Presidential election year. The march might climax a coup of the peace protesters. Many of the "paranoid paramilitarists" might even analogize Dr. King to Ho Chi Minh, and describe the peace coalition as Dr. King's National Liberation Front (The National Liberation Front in South Vietnam almost toppled the South Vietnam regime in 1963).

The latter event might also be analogized to the third and final phase of Mao Tse Tung's formula for the War of Liberation's encirclement tactic. This was the phase which had almost cut Saigon off from the rest of South Vietnam in late 1964 and early 1965 before the U.S. stepped up its commitment and sent American combat troops to prop up the regime.

Washington and Vietnam Parallels

The solution to the problem in Washington, D.C., in 1968, however, could be dealt with more expeditiously than the geopolitical cancer which began growing in Saigon in the fall of 1963. The latter event called for a long shot — assassination of a longtime ally, who had outlived his usefulness to the U.S. and who could no longer hold the line effectively against encroaching Communism. This would create a vacuum that could be quickly filled with an active military junta that would brook no opposition from the insurgents.

In the U.S. situation in 1968, the solution was more simple: assassinate the leader of the insurgents — a feat that could not have been done in Vietnam in 1963. The irony of Diem's oppression was that it was so massive and complete that it prevented the visibility of any one strong personality in the South that could symbolize the leadership of the National Liberation Front and its military arm, the Viet Cong. Instead, the Southern revolutionaries had to look to the North for a personality to symbolize their struggle — Ho Chi Minh. Assassinating Ho Chi Minh was almost next to impossible as neither the U.S. nor the South Vietnamese had any roots or guerrilla infrastructure in the North to get close to the aging nationalist leader.

King and Vietnam Parallels

Assassinating King would be analogous to assassinating Ho Chi Minh in the Vietnamese situation, with added fallout benefits in the U.S. situation: death of King would leave a vacuum of leadership in the SCLC (Rev. Jesse Jackson of Chicago was in competition for the top post with Rev. Ralph Abernathy shortly after King's death). This would defuse the power of the SCLC and perhaps prevent the Poor People's March in June. (The event did not forestall the march, but King's absence in Washington during the month of June will always be an unknown factor in whether the march would have been more effective in terms of concrete concessions from Congress).

The plotters may have assumed that the assassination could easily be blamed on black militarists or some "white nut," or both, without the public ever perceiving the national security implications. King's death would also trigger the black militants into action and they would temporarily create chaos in the cities, but the mighty forces of urban police forces — many of them trained at paramilitary and riot controls in secret camps in Georgia under the aegis of the CIA during the late 1950's and early 1960's — with the help of National Guard units could swiftly crush the dissidents. The broad white middle class, relieved and grateful to the martial forces because of the effective repression of the rebel forces, would be conditioned and predisposed to accept a "man on a white horse" in the forthcoming Presidential election less than six months away. This could mean the election of Governor George Wallace of Alabama (note the concession Wallace made to the paramilitary right: selection of retired Air Force General Curtis LeMay, former chairman of the joint chiefs-of-staff, and vocal hawk, as his Vice Presidential running mate.⁶⁾

"Man on a White Horse" Fever

Or, if a Wallace election was too much to be hoped for, would not a vigorous Wallace candidacy alienate the blue collar workers of the North and Eastern cities from their traditional loyalties to the Democratic Party, and assure a victory of Richard Nixon? And even if the Democrats should win, wouldn't a Humphrey victory be preferable to one by Robert F. Kennedy (still alive at the time)? Wasn't it Humphrey who made the caustic criticism of RFK, when the latter called for a coalition government with the National Liberation Front and the Ky Government in 1966? Humphrey had said that this would be like "putting the fox in the chicken coop". With a "man on a white horse" fever in the air, would not Humphrey be amenable to the paramilitary right, in much the same way he was to the hawkish taskmaster

he had served for four years? And after all, if RFK's popularity were to still survive the shift to the right, could not he be dealt with in another way?

Two Strange Visits

Five days after the eggs and sausage man left Jim's Cafe, two other strange visits — perhaps by the same man — occurred in Memphis. They seem to make the eggs and sausage man's visit seem more significant.

One visit was made by a mysterious blond Latin. The second visit was by a dark-haired man, strangely resembling the blond Latin except for his hair and lack of stylistic clothing. The blond Latin visited an attorney. The dark-haired man visited two ministers. The visits occurred at different times of the day, leaving the possibility that they were by one and the same man. Both visitors gave their next destination as Brownsville, Tenn., for purposes of visiting a well-known member of the Ku Klux Klan. Neither the Klan leader, nor local citizens, ever received a visit from either of the two men.

Thus, the purported visit to Brownsville may have been an attempt to drag a red herring across the investigative trail — a ploy to cast suspicion on a racist or racist organization and divert investigations away from the "national security" motive.

Last but not least, both men exhibited multi-linguistic aptitudes — either to dazzle or to confuse their listeners. They both gave Latin sounding aliases to their listeners. Both purported to have known the man who killed King, his motive and his modus operandi. Both stories coincided in most respects. Both said the killer had impersonated a Negro in setting the scene for Dr. King's assassination (remember the supposed SCLC advance man who convinced Mrs. Bailey to switch Dr. King's suite to the second floor?).

The two ministers and the attorney have tentatively identified their visitors from photographs provided by — Renfro Hays, a Memphis private detective; and Bernard Fensterwald, executive director of The Committee to Investigate Assassinations and a Washington, D.C., attorney.

The evidence suggests that the eggs and sausage man, and the two visitors, are all one and the same man. For the time being, we will call him by the code name Jack Armstrong.

A Soldier of Fortune

Jack Armstrong is a code name for a dark, handsome soldier of fortune. He excels both as a guerrilla fighter and confidence man par excellence. An erstwhile licensed pilot, Armstrong participated in at least three South American revolutions during the decade of the 1950's. Thus, he exploited — and exported — a seller's market for skills provided him by Uncle Sam during the Korean War. Trained by the U.S. Army as a ranger-commando, Armstrong was commissioned directly from the ranks as a second lieutenant. This was a remarkable feat for a 20-year-old youth who had only been in the army a few weeks and had no combat experience, did not have a college degree, had not attended Officers Candidate School, had not taken Army ROTC during the two years of college he attended before enlisting. Perhaps it was because he demonstrated an unusual proficiency for physical agility, firearms, and explosives.

* HOW ABSURD! CIA HAS/HAD NO USE FOR WALLACE.

as well as an aptitude for inexhaustible rough and tumble combat. He registered a score of 142 on the Army General Classification Test — a score roughly comparable to an IQ score earned by less than a fraction of one per cent of those tested in the Armed Services at that time. Other tests reflected an aptitude for languages and verbal fluency as well as high mechanical insight. He later fought behind the lines in North Korea. After the war, he would brag to close friends at college that he once rescued a contingent of downed B-29 crews across the Yalu River in Manchuria near that nation's industrial complex.

A Natural Born Fighter

Slightly less than six feet tall, Armstrong possessed in his youth a lean — but deceptively muscular — physique. He acquired a reputation as a "murderous in-fighter" in hand-to-hand combat, both among his army buddies and his college friends. He employed a unique style that combined the best of boxing, judo, karate, and "dirty football tactics," comments an old college chum, who described how Armstrong whipped a college football teammate outweighing Armstrong by 10 pounds and having a longer reach.

"His victim," the college teammate said, "went on later to become a famous professional football player, but in a slugfest with Jack, he would always be a hopeless amateur outmatched by a relentless pro."

Another college acquaintance — not necessarily a close friend — witnessed the same fight. He said: "Jack had the instincts of a natural born street fighter alright. He loved fighting and if he had less intelligence, he probably would have gone into the ring. When you first met Jack, you would say to yourself ... 'this is a nice guy ... quiet, unassuming, very modest, very friendly with a sly grin and almost a wink in his eye as if you and him shared some private joke' I later learned his friendliness was a facade — behind it was a come-on. He wanted some one to attack him so he could retaliate. He would set up his victims — always bigger than himself — by inviting friendly responses and then turning them into aggressive acts that would justify a retaliatory response."

Armstrong's affinity for violence and danger approached "pathological proportions," the college acquaintance said. He added: "I believe that Jack is a true psychopath ... or a sociopath as psychiatrists use the term today"

Armstrong's physical prowess, however, has caused him trouble. Rap sheets from metropolitan police departments in several cities show he has been arrested on charges of assault and battery on several occasions. However, those same rap sheets show no convictions.

Right Out of James Bond Fiction

A skeptic would be justified in believing that the above character sketch was taken out of a James Bond plot if there were not ample documentation for the above listed facts. Reading Armstrong's dossier further, his life begins to sound even more like the script of a contemporary espionage thriller.

His real name, however, is known to Bernard Fensterwald, executive director of The Committee to Investigate Assassinations. It is also known to the

FBI, and the Memphis Police Department investigators who handled the Martin Luther King assassination.

Link to Kennedy Assassination?

Armstrong's real name appears at least once in the appendix of the prolix Warren Commission report. Critics of the Commission have described this section as the "throw-away bin" — any material that did not fit the pre-conceived "lone assassin, two bullet" frame of reference projected by the Commission members found itself in the appendix, rather than the narrative body of the report.

Commission staff investigators collected a welter of reports about plots and counter-plots that the Commissioners later deemed irrelevant.

One included an interview with a witness who related the details of a gun running scheme planned in a Dallas, Tex., apartment in late 1961. The scenario included one other soldier of fortune — later murdered in New Orleans by arsenic poisoning — and an unidentified Army Colonel. The plot called for smuggling a cache of weapons into Cuba for the benefit of anti-Castro guerillas, who were building an underground for a second attempt to overthrow Premier Fidel Castro.

Although the witness had apparently never seen Armstrong, the witness knew Armstrong by name. The witness linked Armstrong with none other than Jack Ruby — the Dallas nightclub owner who shot Lee Harvey Oswald to death in the basement of the Dallas police station in front of the eyes of the entire world via television cameras.

Armstrong and the other soldier of fortune were supposed to be the ones to smuggle a cache of weapons (apparently stolen from military bases by the right-wing colonel) into Cuba. Ruby, who was present at the meeting with several other persons whom the witness did not know by name, was the "bag man" for the operations — that is, he provided the funds for the operation at the same meeting. Investigative reports in later years indicated Ruby was not the actual "Sugar Daddy" for the operation, but merely a financial conduit of a wealthy Houston, Texas, man.

Not knowing Armstrong by sight, the witness described a "young, mysterious Cuban" who was present. The purported Cuban never said anything. The witness was not sure what the Cuban's role in the venture was supposed to be.

The purported Cuban, however, was neither young nor Cuban. He was Jack Armstrong himself. (In the next installment, an in-depth portrayal of Jack Armstrong.)

Footnotes

1. William Turner. Power on the Right (New York: Ramparts Press), pp. 77-78.
2. In a series of letters to Robert Collins, staff writer for The St. Louis Post-Dispatch, DePugh maintained that he did have sufficient allies inside the Federal government that enabled him to elude capture by the FBI for almost 18 months. Ironically enough, DePugh went into hiding shortly after his indictment and that was only a few weeks before King's murder. One hideout the FBI raided contained documents that included the list containing four Americans marked for assassination. DePugh, however, said this was an FBI planted document. DePugh said he some-

times received tips from Minutemen inside the Federal government that the FBI had discovered his new hideout and were going to raid it. DePugh said he escaped several times only minutes ahead of the raiding agents. When he was captured near Truth Or Consequences, New Mexico, reporters asked him if the Minutemen were responsible for King's death. DePugh vigorously denied it and said when asked if he had any knowledge of those behind the murder: "The CIA or some other Federal agency". In another interview, DePugh said the Minutemen had a much more massive membership than the FBI realized, and that the paramilitary organization had penetrated the higher levels of the Federal government.

3. William Bradford Huie. He Slew the Dreamer (New York: Delacourt Press), pp. 176-177.
4. Jim Bishop. The Days of Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons), pp. 2, 102, 109, 115, 149. Bayard Rustin advised King to stay away from anti-Vietnam peace demonstrations and to lay off anti-war sloganeering in 1965 because of tactical reasons. Tying in the black civil rights movement with the peace movement would erode the vast bargaining power King had with a friendly, pro-civil rights administration. Rustin later changed his views when the war fever mounted and Johnson had escalated the bombing raids over North Vietnam in 1966-1967.
5. William Schulz. "Safety of America at Stake," Reader's Digest (April, 1968). Ironically, the issue containing the article reached Memphis newsstands only a few days before King was killed.
6. Ibid.
7. Colonel Fletcher Prouty. The Secret Team (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, pp. 2, 394-395. If one has read David Halberstam's The Best and the Brightest (New York: Random House) one must read Prouty's book to understand the depth of regimented deception, bureaucratic myopia, and military duplicity that led America into the quagmire of Vietnam. Halberstam reported the war first-hand, and documents his thesis by extrinsic sources. Col. Prouty, however, a retired Air Force officer, played a key role inside the Pentagon and was once a focal control officer for many clandestine CIA operations. His conclusions, surprisingly, confirm those of Halberstam. Prouty strongly suggests (page 2) that the assassinations of both Kennedy and Dr. King (as well as Diem, Nhu, Ham-marskjöld, Trujillo) were perpetrated by a "Secret Team" — an inner establishmentarian clique that cuts across military, State Department, CIA, and financial leadership of the nation. "The power of the team is enhanced by the 'cult of the gun' and by its sometimes brutal and arbitrary anti-Communist flag-waving, even when Communism has nothing to do with the matter at hand. The Secret Team does not like criticism, investigation, or history, and is always prone to see the world in two divided camps — 'them' and 'us'."
8. LeMay's famous advice to President Johnson in 1964 before Johnson launched massive bombing of North Vietnam was that "two weeks of massive bombing of Vietnam" would force the abdication of Ho Chi Minh and the surrender of all North Vietnam forces in South Vietnam. LeMay apparently believed in the Rusk theory prevalent at that time — namely, that all of the guerilla fighting in the South at that time was due to North Vietnamese infiltrators, rather than disaffected South Vietnamese engaged in a civil war against the Saigon regime. □